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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001836

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [BTIO](#) [BA](#) [ECTRD](#) [OFFICIALS](#) [REGION](#)

SUBJECT: DAS GRAY DISCUSSES REGIONAL ISSUES WITH FOREIGN
MINISTER SHAIKH KHALID

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) NEA DAS Gordon Gray met December 4 with Bahrain Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid Al-Khalifa for a discussion of regional issues. On Iraq, Shaikh Khalid said he was urging Arab Foreign Ministers discussing Iraq reconciliation to meet in Baghdad. Not doing so sends the wrong message. He talked at length on Iran, saying that the GOB has pushed Iran to be open and transparent on the nuclear issue. He reiterated concern about Iranian interference in Iraq, urging that we not let Iran "destroy Iraq." He also expressed concern about Iranian meddling in Bahrain, but acknowledged that overt interference was considerably less than in the 1990s. He said he recently traveled to Damascus to deliver a message from the King on the need to "make the right decision" regarding the Mehlis Commission. On the FTA, he said Bahrain was committed to trying to do what it could to ensure entry in to force by January 1, and stressed that there was no going back on the decision to close the boycott office. End Summary.

IRAQ AND IRAN

2. (C) NEA DAS Gordon Gray opened his December 4 meeting with Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa by expressing appreciation for Bahrain's support on Iraq and soliciting Bahrain's help in encouraging all Iraqis to participate in the December 15 elections, in particular Iraq's Sunni community. Shaikh Khalid said that he had met the day before with Iraqi Vice President Ghazi Al Yawer (in Manama for the IISS Gulf Security Conference), who said he was working hard to get Sunnis to participate. Shaikh Khalid said that he had been trying to convince Arab Foreign Ministers who have been involved in reconciliation meetings with Iraqis to hold a meeting in Baghdad. "If we can meet in Cairo or Jeddah," he said, "but aren't willing to go to Baghdad, it sends the wrong message."

3. (C) Shaikh Khalid said that he had met the previous day with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohamed Reza Bageri (also in Bahrain for the IISS Conference), telling him that Iran must be open and transparent on the nuclear question. "If the world has concerns about Iran," he told Bageri, "then Bahrain has concerns. If the world is afraid, then Iran must open up and not hide anything. Otherwise, if anything goes wrong it only has itself to blame." He said that the Iranian's response was that under Sharia law it was forbidden to build a nuclear weapon. He said that Iran has already sent him three invitations (one written, two oral) to visit Tehran. He didn't know when he might accept that invitation.

4. (C) Shaikh Khalid reiterated Bahrain's concern about Iranian intervention in Iraq. "Keep your eyes on them," he said. "Don't let them destroy Iraq." He lamented that Iraq, which before Saddam had been so liberal with freedoms and a modern constitution, and even during Iran had remained secular, was now being destroyed by secularism. "Iran is playing a nasty game," he stated, alleging that Iranian hit squads in Iraq were carrying out a vendetta against Iraqi military officers who had served in the Iran-Iraq War. He urged that the U.S. do what it can to diminish the Iranian presence in Iraq.

4. (C) As in Iraq, he said, Iran is also meddling in Bahrain, although not to the extent it did in the 1990s. He said that Bahrain is monitoring communications between the two countries and had uncovered minor evidence of Iranian meddling, but nothing major at this point. "But we know they will keep up their old behavior." He said that the Crown Prince, after resisting a requested meeting the day before with DFM Begari, finally agreed to a quick pull-aside after the IISS dinner that night. In the brief discussion, the Crown Prince had chided the Iranian delegation for sponsoring terrorism and told him this was unworthy of a country with such a distinguished past.

SYRIA

16. (C) The Ambassador asked Shaikh Khalid about his recent stop in Syria, where he met with Syrian President Assad. Shaikh Khalid said that he went with a message from the King urging Assad to make the right decision to protect Syria. He said his visit followed right on the heels of a visit by Prince Bandar, which he took as a positive sign as Prince Bandar knows how to get things done. He said that Assad wanted a protocol for dealing with the Mehliis Commission, but this was obviously a non-starter. He found Assad uncharacteristically willing to listen. "Assad usually talks for an hour and listens for two minutes, but this time he was different."

FTA IMPLEMENTATION PROSPECTS

17. (C) The Ambassador noted that as the FTA approached U.S. congressional ratification, it would be critical for the GoB to confirm that promised labor and intellectual property rights (IPR) legislation had been introduced into the parliament. Achieving this over the next few days was critical to ensure entry into force on January 1, 2006. Shaikh Khalid said the GoB was committed to doing everything it could to meet the requirements.

18. (C) Shaikh Khalid lamented that, in the Bahraini public's mind, the closure of the boycott office had been confused with normalization with Israel. He had tried to clarify the issue and frame the closure of the boycott office as placing the responsibility to purchase or not purchase Israeli goods in the hands of the citizens. He assured DAS Gray and the Ambassador that the GOB remained committed to lifting the boycott. "This is something we believe in." He noted that Crown Prince Salman planned to travel to the U.S. in April 2006, and he could take the opportunity at that time to promote enhanced bilateral commercial relations coming as a result of the FTA.

EGYPT

19. (C) Shaikh Khalid noted that Arab leaders are watching the Egyptian election process with great interest. He said the absence of anti-western sentiments during the recent elections was particularly promising.

GREATER US-GCC ENGAGEMENT URGED

110. (C) Shaikh Khalid said that he did not expect any surprises at the GCC Summit in Abu Dhabi later this month. He encouraged USG engagement on GCC issues, and welcomed any USG input before the Summit.
MONROE